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Statement submitted by FEMM Foundation, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council*

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.

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Statement

The FEMM Foundation is a knowledge-based health program for women inspired by women's right to be informed participants in their own healthcare and to make voluntary decisions based on options, information, and understanding. The Foundation is dedicated to health education, medical research, and improving reproductive health care to advance women's health. FEMM's work includes health education for women, medical training for doctors, and reproductive health research, which undergirds all of our work.

International law recognizes a right to the "highest attainable standard of health." The Sustainable Development Goals reflect this in their commitment to health in Goal 3. Good health empowers achievement in education and work; in contrast, poor health can lead to missing school, lost days at work, and lower income. By ensuring quality healthcare for all, we enable everyone's participation in the social and economic life of their communities. This participation closes gaps in equality and animates social inclusion, and makes good fiscal and wage policies more likely to reach as many as possible. For women and girls, who often face inequality and are not fully included, reproductive health (target 3.7) is a key part in this equation.

Women and girls comprise approximately half the population of the world but remain more vulnerable to health problems due to both biological and social reasons. Women and girls in rural areas often have access to fewer doctors and clinics, and may not have the financial ability to get the care they need. Health can help or hinder women and girls' education and participation in the social and economic life of their communities. By implementing good healthcare in rural communities for women and girls, we ensure that we do not leave half of humanity behind in poverty eradication and sustainable development policies.

Understanding one's own body is essential for good health and empowers women and girls to be informed participants in their care. Women also often accept as normal symptoms such as irregular bleeding, pain, depression, mood swings, and weight gain, nor realizing that these are often signs of underlying hormonal imbalances and abnormalities. Even when women do seek medical care, most health care providers and programs struggle to diagnose them and often can only treat the symptoms.

These underlying conditions can affect women and girls' long-term overall health, sometimes irreversibly. They can also affect women and girls' ability to complete their education, engage in work, and plan their families, and other aspects of their lives. Poor health hurts equality by undermining women and girls' ability to realize their potential and drive development in their communities. Women and girls who have untreated medical conditions can be empowered through both knowledge and good medical treatment.

A woman who understands how her body works can monitor her health and seek help when needed. Even women who have not completed schooling can learn to monitor their signs of health. Understanding women's bodies will also combat stigma and myths associated with normal biological processes such as menstruation that can keep women and girls from educational and career opportunities.

FEMM has developed an app to help women take control of their health. The FEMM App is available free of charge and is now available in English and Spanish on both iPhone and Android systems. Women who use the FEMM App can track their observations and symptoms to better understand their bodies and health. Just as each woman is different, so are her observations and experiences, which is why the App is completely customizable. Women can track as much or as little as they like and add symptoms and observations. It also provides insights into what a woman is

experiencing in her cycle, and can flag potential health concerns and connect women with medical professionals for treatment.

FEMM also enables women to make informed choices about family planning. There is a right to adequate family planning and information about reproductive and sexual health that is accurate and respects cultural, religious, and ethical beliefs. Programs focused on providing commodities often fail to ensure that women have the education needed to understand their bodies and what they are using, and may not always respect values.

Information-based health education and medical care is uniquely well suited to meet these needs while respecting individual choices and values. FEMM offers reproductive and hormonal education and helps women to understand the way various family planning methods work and their potential side effects. It educates women about the science of their bodies, how to identify when they are fertile, and how to achieve or avoid pregnancy. It also can demystify how women and girls' bodies work, combating stigma and promoting understanding and respect.

FEMM's researchers have rethought women's health. They have found that a woman's hormonal health is intrinsically linked with her overall health. They have developed better diagnostic criteria to identify conditions that are currently treated mainly at the symptomatic level and treat them at the roots. They are even discovering links with conditions not typically considered related to reproductive health. FEMM is rethinking the health of contemporary women in ways that will help them to take charge of their health and thrive in their communities.

Women and girls also need good healthcare to meet their needs when they do identify health concerns. FEMM's Medical Management program trains doctors to diagnose and treat reproductive health problems, with a holistic view of a woman's body that incorporates recent research on the complex hormonal interactions between different body systems. This interaction, and the delicacy of the hormonal activity in a woman's body, is essential to the experience of health in the entire female body. FEMM has developed innovative protocols that allow doctors to identify underlying problems with precision and treat them effectively. This medical support provides treatments that help women to live healthy lives.

FEMM is low-cost and meets the underlying needs of women. Comprehensive health care for women can now be provided through basic health delivery systems, making this approach to women's health more effective, cheaper to deliver, and providing stronger health outcomes for women. Even women who have not completed schooling can learn to monitor their signs of health. Understanding women's bodies will also combat stigma and myths associated with normal biological processes such as menstruation.

Women's full participation in society requires the investment in women's health and health education. Women's healthcare has often failed to meet women's needs. We know that informed decisions lead to healthier decisions, and that women play a key role in family and community health outcomes. Through FEMM's innovative programs, women will be empowered to take charge of their healthcare, and health systems will be able to meet their needs.

FEMM's programs are ready to be incorporated into the health aspects of social protection programs and FEMM is ready to assist in implementing them. The knowledge gained through FEMM can allow women to identify underlying health concerns and to achieve or avoid pregnancy. When people attain the highest level of health they can, they are able to thrive and partake in their communities, ensuring social inclusion and equality for women and girls. FEMM is prepared to assist the Commission and Member States to meet this goal.